Spectre Disorder: Neuro-Marxism and the State of the Soul

Ortwin de Graef
(University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium)

Abstract: This paper proves that we live in the era of neuro-ideology. One spirit of Marx stresses the forces of alienation that facilitate human inhumanity, then putting its faith in human nature or just use value, as the last resort. Another spirit of Marx questions the former opinion, and embraces findings of neuroscience on human nature, since neuroscience could restore natural harmony, it could make us finding the real problems of human society. The autor called the latter thought as neuro-marxism.

Any reflection on Marxism and the future must engage with its past. Depending on the processing of the pronoun, that may mean either the past of Marxism, or the past of the reflection on Marxism and the future. It should always mean both, but life is short and discursive regimes differ, so as a philologist rather than a philosopher or political scientist I am drawn to the latter option.

Twenty years ago, in April 1993, at a conference called *Whither Marxism?*, Jacques Derrida called for a commemoration of the radically unprecedented event of the advent of Marxism. For the first time in the history of the world, a philosophico-scientific discourse resolutely renouncing any appeal to myth, religion, or nation, called for the formation of global social organisations in the name of new concepts of the human, of society, economy, nation and State.① Inheriting that event, or that

① Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 149—150.

promise, Derrida argues, requires a double interpretation of the world and all of its wrongs, a twofold interpretation faithful to at least two spirits of Marx—and, it's worth underscoring, two spirits of Derrida, since this double programme echoes the set-up already announced in *De la grammatologie* in 1967 and rehearsed in "Structure, signe et jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines" in the same year. ① Uncharacteristically straightforward, Derrida list ten things that plague the world in 1993. They're still with us: unemployment, homelessness, global economic war, freaks of the free market, foreign debt, the arms industry in general, nuclear arms in particular, inter-ethnic war, crime syndicates and crises of international law. Ten indices of badness, out-of-jointness or evil requiring double interpretation. The first interpretation consists in the denunciation of the gap between what is the case in the world and what should be the case in the name of the measures of justice—minimally liberty, equality and dignity. Here, interpretation is the name of a praxis that seeks to efface itself: the point is to change the world so that it may finally coincide with the proposed ideal and render all critical interpretation superfluous. The second interpretation "obeys a different logic"②: it targets the concept of the ideal itself—liberty, equality, dignity, and inevitably also the very notion of the human—inspired in this activity by Marx's own insistence on the inevitable obsolescence of his theses in the face of the future. ③ The point is precisely not to choose between these two approaches: both are necessary in their incompatibility, and this necessary incompatibility challenges the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach by advocating the defiant oxymoron of a performative or transformative interpretation. ④

One form of our question today is how to inherit this programme—not as philosophers, as Derrida does in the second half of *Spectres*, which mounts meticulous analyses of Marx's acerbic dealings with the spectres haunting Max Stirner and of the celebrated turning table in the opening pages of *Capital*—but, speaking for myself, as philologists, doing the scholarly work of our trade, reading literary texts and the history they inherit and transmit. My comments here will involve the representation of

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① For a suggestive inflection of this double programme in the inheritance of Derrida's thought, see the concluding speculations in Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political* (1996).

② Derrida, *Spectres*, 143.

③ Derrida, *Spectres*, 35.

④ Derrida, *Spectres*, 89.

collective agency and the ideology of sympathy.

In the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, the English establishment's fear of revolutionary unrest fostered a climate of harsh repression, as evident most notably in the brutal attack on reform protesters known as the Peterloo Massacre on August 16, 1819. The event infuriated the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and inspired him to write a series of political poems venting his indignation. But sharing indignation is easy. These poems are worth reading again for what seems much harder to share—the voice of the people they would represent, and therefore also the agency such voice might voice.

The song "To the Men of England" is a good case in point, moving as it does from insurrectionary interpellation and exhortation to a sense of semi-cynical resignation. The first half of the poem consists of a series of questions addressed to the working classes, asking them why they slave away for the tyrants that exploit them. In the fifth quatrain, the speaker summarises the basic condition Marx would soon diagnose as "alienation," and in the sixth quatrain he calls on the workers to take control of their own labour. But then, in the two closing quatrains, the poem takes a strange turn, ordering the workers to "shrink" back to their holes and to dig their own grave:

> With plough and spade and hoe and loom
> Trace your grave and build your tomb
> And weave your winding-sheet—till fair
> England be your Sepulchre. (ll. 29—32)①

While this closing injunction asks to be understood as at least in some sense ironic, it does conclude the poem on a doubtful note, indicating a lack of confidence in the potential for agency in the workers whose liberation the poem sets out to preach.② Importantly, the men of England addressed in the poem remain silent throughout, and

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① Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Song: To the Men of England," *The Poems of Shelley*, *Volume* 3: 1818—1920. Ed. Jack Donovan, Cian Duffy, Kelvin Everest & Michael Rossington (London: Pearson, 2011), 278—280.

② For a vivid account of the questions raised by the conclusion of "Men of England", see William Keach, "Rise Like Lions? Shelley and the Revolutionary Left," *International Socialism*, *quarterly journal of the Socialist Workers Party*, July 1997. http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj75/keach.htm. Last accessed February 13, 2013.

the only actions positively ascribed to them are their acts of servitude.

The sepulchral trope closing the poem also marks the end of another poem written around the same time, the sonnet "England in 1819."① In sharp contrast to the short straigthforward sentences in "Men of England," this text consists of one extended sentence only: twelve lines listing all that is ill in England form the subject; verb and predicate make up the concluding couplet. The litany of ills here also mentions the Peterloo Massacre, but apart from that the diagnosis of the condition of England is delivered in a discourse destined for the politically literate rather than the labouring poor. The sonnet's *volta* twists that dark diagnosis into a conditional prognosis of redemption: all the ills of England in 1819

> Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may
> Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day. (ll. 13—14)②

While at first sight this trope might seem to harbour more hope than "Men of England," it is important to note that here, too, positive collective agency is bracketed and release is featured only as a miraculous spectral intervention from beyond the grave. As for the lower classes, if anything they appear even more impotent here, unrepresented in most of the text, featuring only in one verse of Shelley's catastrophe catalogue: "A people starved and stabbed on th' untilled field" (l. 7).

"Ode to the West Wind," one of Shelley's more canonical works, while also written in 1819, at first reading seems very far removed from the "tempestuous" political unrest informing the two previous pieces. It, too, deploys sepulchral tropology, but this at first appears to be a more speculative formulaic matter, an invocation of the regenerative cycle of nature in which the—here literally—tempestuous autumn wind scatters seeds into the "grave" (l. 8) from which the spring will release them.③ In the fourth stanza, however, in line with its overall structure as a sequence of five sonnets, the Ode takes a turn and begins to draft an overarching analogy

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① The richest reading of this sonnet remains James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), esp. 23—33.

② Shelley, "England in 1819," *Poems*, 189—192.

③ Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind," *Poems*, 200—212.

between the speaker and the natural objects subject to the wind's workings in the three preceding stanzas. In the final stanza, this analogy reaches a climax in the image of the wind scattering the poet's "words among mankind," thus delivering "a prophecy" "to unawakened Earth." (ll. 67—69) While the substance of that prophecy remains undisclosed, what demands attention is the complexity of its transmission which the initial analogy tends to naturalise away. Imagining the wind scattering seeds or leaves across the universe, it is tempting to anthropomorphise or indeed spectralise it as a purposive agent serving a focussed intention. What makes Shelley's rhetoric so complex—most obviously perhaps in the slightly earlier "Mont Blanc"—is its struggle against the theist or pantheist fantasies it also always harbours, a struggle which often requires a resistance to the teleological charge informing grammar itself. Giving in to this teleological temptation facilitates the seductive fantasy of an analogous power intelligently servicing the distribution and preservation of words and thoughts, and "Ode to the West Wind" certainly flirts with such fantasy. But ultimately Shelley's rigour scrambles the analogy of agency the Ode entertains: the interjection "by the incantation of this verse" (l. 65) puts the wind in its place and insists it won't just blow where it lists—"Be through my lips to unawakened Earth / The trumpet of a prophecy." (ll. 68—69)① The performative power of the poem's verse defies the natural force it simultaneously seeks to model itself on.

Abandoning the teleological temptation of natural analogism comes at a price, though: the homonomic indifference of metabolic transmission served by fortuitous physical conditions (or not, as the case may be: seed will land on barren rock) finds its other in the radical heteronomy of symbolic transmission, requiring responsibilities of reception that exceed the logic of life alone. Yet the infusion of sheer force in the practice of "incantation" offers surrogate seductions for the temptations of natural analogism. Returning to "Men of England," we should at least register that this text was not primarily destined for reading but rather for singing—and indeed it has become a popular number at socialist gatherings. I have tried to test this power of incantation myself when teaching this poem, first doing a solo attempt at hymnody, which didn't

① For more extended alternative readings of Shelley's poetics of transmission in the Ode, see Chandler, *England in* 1819, 531—554, and Andrew Franta, "Shelley and the Poetics of Political Indirection." *Poetics Today* 22.4 (2001): 765—793; 789—791.

work, but then trying out punk and gangsta style remixes, and that did seem to fan the flame. But the question remains whether that flame burns for pleasure or business—or how its burning for both affects justice. If the semantics of the poem's closing couplet play a sardonic pun on "fair" England as a pleasing substitute for a just society, thereby deconstructing the aesthetic ideology subtending business as the purveyor of pleasure at the expense of justice, the somatic charge released in chanting "fair" to rhyme with "sepulchre" risks rewiring the singing subjects into a scenario that perpetuates the confusion of business-cum-pleasure with justice. While there is no doubt communal chanting releases sensations of power that may enable collective agency in response to discontent, the aesthetic quality of the experience always also (but especially perhaps in the absence of articulated alternative interests) translates this potential as the disinterested pleasure of purposiveness without purpose—or the disabling sense of awe in the face of what Marx calls the "indefinite colossalness" of the goals of the proletarian revolution. ①

First as tragedy, then as farce. Just under half a century after the Peterloo Massacre, a massive Reform League demonstration demanding the franchise for men is denied access to Hyde Park. The crowd bring the railings down, invade the park, and the planned meeting proceeds. Soon after, in the lectures later published as *Culture and Anarchy*, Matthew Arnold holds up "the Hyde Park rioter" for ironical ridicule

> Just as the rest of us,—as the country squires in the aristocratic class, as the political dissenters in the middle-class,—he has no idea of a *State*, of the nation in its collective and corporate character controlling, as government, the free swing of this or that one of its members in the name of the higher reason of all of them, his own as well as that of others. He sees the rich, the aristocratic class, in occupation of the executive government, and so if he is stopped from making Hyde Park a bear-garden or the streets impassable, he says he is being butchered by the aristocracy.
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> His apparition is somewhat embarrassing, because too many cooks spoil the broth; because, while the aristocratic and middle classes have long been doing as they like with great vigour, he has been too undeveloped and submissive hitherto to join in the game; and now, when he does come, he comes in immense numbers,

① Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), chapter 1. Online at http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm. Last accessed Febrary 14, 2013.

and is rather raw and rough. ①

If for Shelley the challenge seemed primarily to imagine working-class agency, for Arnold such agency is all too apparent: like the agency of the other classes, the Barbarians and the Philistines, it is the loose-cannon agency of anarchy, of doing as one likes. Arnold's alternative is the agency of culture, driven by the spirit of perfection, and established in the structures of the State. ② Arnold's challenge, then, is the imagination of a state serving not self-interest or class-interest but the interest of what he calls our best self and higher reason.

It is more fun to imagine the contempt such thinking would have met with from Marx than to entertain the prospect of what such a State of Perfection might look like. Yet precisely the spirit of Marx can be critical here—at least that spirit of Marx that is ready to reconsider the dynamics of alienation and to take seriously Arnold's claim that the State he seeks to think as the structure of our best self is in essence the State of the Aliens: "persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general *humane* spirit, by the love of human perfection." ③ To call these lovers of human perfection "aliens" invites a reflection on the human as an unfamiliar animal—a *Gattungswesen* concerned in all it produces with its own species—or rather its species as never quite its own, not just more of the same but precisely the species of difference. For instance the difference between the "bright powers of sympathy and ready powers of action" which the Reform League's Frederic Harrison singles out as distinctive working-class virtues and the "increased sympathy" Arnold holds up as distinctive of human perfection. ④ For the difference between "bright powers of sympathy" and "increased sympathy" to be critically meaningful, it must make more difference than increase itself can cover and must also affect the very idea of sympathy.

I want to return once more to 1819, and another Shelley poem responding to Peterloo.

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① Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and other writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 88.

② For Arnold's conception of the State, see Ortwin de Graef & Anke Gilleir, "'The Stigma of Its Present Name': Matthew Arnold's Scripts of State." *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* v. 2 (December 20, 2010), http://occasion.stanford.edu/node/48.

③ Arnold, *Culture*, 110.

④ Arnold, *Culture*, 97, 76.

"The Mask of Anarchy" is a much more ambitious work than the other occasional pieces mentioned before, but it, too, has been the subject of critical debate regarding Shelley's representation of working-class agency.① A substantial part of the 91—quattrain-long text offers an alternative address to the "Men of England," and as in that other poem, the addressees are not given direct access to speech—though their imagined repetition of the speech urged on them by the address's speaker is explicitly figured as a powerfully performative force of attack and protection:

'Let a vast assembly be,
And with great solemnity
Declare with measured words that ye
Are, as God has made ye, free—

'Be your strong and simple words
Keen to wound as sharpened swords,
And wide as targes let them be,
With their shade to cover ye. (ll. 299—306)②

That these words should be sanctioned by God complicates the freedom they proclaim, and the people's potential for self-assertion is further qualified when they are urged to "Let the laws of [their] own land, / Good or ill, between [them] stand" as "Arbiters of the dispute." (ll. 327—330) Represented as still determined by nation and God rather than justice, the working class appears to remain destined for England fair's sepulchre. But the poem also imagines an alternative power for the people, a force beyond or beneath speech representing an alternative authority in the face of Anarchy:

'Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute,

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① For a recent state of the art account, see Kir Kuiken, "Shelley's 'Mask of Anarchy' and the Problem of Modern Sovereignty." *Literature Compass* 8/2 (2011): 95—106.

② Shelley, "The Mask of Anarchy: Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester," *Poems*, 27—63.

With folded arms and looks which are
Weapons of an unvanquished war (ll. 323—326)

It is this image of resolute mute resistance frankly facing the forces of oppression that has made this poem an important moment in the history of pacifist protest—and indeed a direct source of inspiration for Ghandi.① The authority imagined here derives from neither God nor nation, nor even from abstract enlightenment principles like liberty, but from the naked human face:

And if then the tyrants dare
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew,—
What they like, that let them do.

With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.

Then they will return with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak
In hot blushes on their cheek. (ll. 344—355)

Shelley's imagination of the force of the naked human face is powerful and just—though just not just enough. Not because it demands the impossible but because it doesn't. The combination of ruthlessness and defiant trust informing the command to offer defenceless bodies up for slaughter as a test of shared humanity is both appalling and appealing and exerts an ultimately aesthetic fascination which risks obscuring just how low the standard is set. Slashing and stabbing and maiming and hewing other

① Susan Wolfson presents a powerful reading of these stanza's as a "fantasy of political performance" in which political action is translated into "static aesthetic spectacle." Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997), 200.

humans is wrong. Not that that standard does not need constant reinforcement—as the occasion of the poem and the two centuries since make all too depressingly clear. But to ground that standard in the face-to-face of singular human beings, victims and perpetrators, is to give human nature too much credit. Yes, human animals are singularly subject to upsurges of sympathy which foster compassion and hinder the infliction of pain; yes, sympathy is easily overruled in the service of self-interest or the vicarious self-interest of subservience to force, leading to indifference to suffering or (but it may be the same thing) direct denial of the humanity of the victims of suffering. The increasingly complex and interconnected networks of human interaction characterising our modern condition, of which Shelley witnessed but the first real manifestations, only make such overruling, indifference and denial easier still. But trusting the bright powers of sympathy to redress this just by reminding us of the human nature so easily overruled in the first place is to sentimentalise a predicament that requires not more feeling, not a deeper, but a different shade of shame—a passionate indifference, an acute disinterest, a more alien sentiment of discontent desiring a justice that exceeds the prevention of human inhumanity to man, a sober anger that dismisses aestheticisations of human sympathy which only serve to strengthen the invisible-hand fantasies that give capitalism its all too human face. In sum, a willingness to entertain alienation as what it has come to for us humans as we begin to live the posthuman, and the species-being we are demands to differ. ①

Shelley's uneasy explorations of the aesthetic ideology of sympathy deserve a better reading than I intend here. This would minimally require an engament with the ghost of Wordsworth, who haunts *The Mask of Anarchy* in various guises and will always remain Shelley's unfinished business. ② And indeed ours, for the ideology of sympathy Wordsworth inherited from Adam Smith and naturalised as our common humanity still

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① For some further thoughts on the right to alienation, see Pieter Vermeulen, Stef Craps, Richard Crownshaw, Ortwin de Graef, Andreas Huyssen, Vivian Liska & David Miller, "Dispersal and redemption: The future dynamics of memory studies-A roundtable." Memory Studies 5:2, 2012, 223—239; 232—234.

② For a direct allusion to Wordsworth's "The Thorn" in *The Mask*, see Morton D. Paley, "Apocapolitics: Allusion and Structure in Shelley's 'Mask of Anarchy'," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 54: 2, 1991, 91—109; 96. Chandler's *England in* 1819 offers an excellent exploration of Shelley's "sublime casuistry" (511) as a critical and genuinely historical alternative to both the natural/national ideology of sympathy associated with Wordsworth and the insufficiently dialectical programmes of utilitarian reform.

informs us—though now, as indeed Wordsworth anticipated in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, it has morphed into science:

> If the labours of men of Science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present, but he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of Science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the Science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of the respective Sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called Science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man. ①

The curious narrative inversion and the imagery in this projected alliance of science and poetry rehearse the domestication of revolution that is the dominant trope in Wordsworth's aesthetic ideology: just as Wordsworth's initial fervent support for the French Revolution suffered a sea change in the course of the 1790s which he himself retrospectively diagnosed as a gradual recognition—catalysed by the horrors of the September Massacres—that whatever enthused him in the Revolution was really only ever its imitation of the domestic natural liberty England was always already blessed with, ② so the challenge of science the poet vows to follow is recuperated in its projected integration in the "household of man" thanks to the theotropic hospitality of poetry. Science "now", in 1802, is something of a spectral force, which may work a revolution that will change our "condition"; yet the effect of that revolution will be an

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① William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)," *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems*, 1797—1800, *The Cornell Wordsworth*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992), 740—760; 753.

② For a concise account of this tropological pattern in Wordsworth's 1805 *Prelude*, see Ortwin de Graef, "Nothing out of Hermeneutics' certain course". *Image & Narrative: On-Line Magazine of the Visual Narrative*, 3 (2001) http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/illustrations/ortwindegraef.htm.

aesthetic de-spectralisation, transfiguring science into comforting confirmation. The poet, Wordsworth writes, "is the rock of defence of human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love"; "bind[ing] together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time."① Aided by poetry, the revolution worked by science ends up in a reconfiguration of this vast empire into a family by the fireside.

We live in the era of neuro-ideology. The trust in human nature as a secret resource whose disclosure by science will truly bring the new millennium that failed to materialise along with the Y2K bug has never run so high. A recent instance is Simon Baron-Cohen's *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A New Theory of Human Cruelty and Kindness* (2011), presented by the author as a sequel to two of his earlier books, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (1995) and *The Essential Difference: Men, Women and the Extreme Male Brain* (2003).②

It is not insignificant that in presenting *Zero Degrees* as third in a trilogy, Baron-Cohen glosses over his other single-authored book, *Autism and Asperger Syndrome: The Facts* (2008)—for as its subtitle suggests, that volume, in all its helpfully informative expert modesty, interrupts the increase in ideological ambition driving the trilogy. Baron-Cohen's first book, *Mindblindness*, was a revision of his doctorate thesis aimed at fellow scientists but also at "the general reader," and has been rightly recognised as an important contribution to the wider understanding of what is now usually called autism spectrum disorder.③ The subtitle mentions "theory of mind," but the book does not pretend to be a theory of the mind—rather, it advances the hypothesis, backed up by empirical observations and experiments, that typically developing humans learn to detect intentionality and eye direction in others, can process this information into the construction of shared attention between themselves and others, and can thereby richly represent the mental state of other human beings—imaging or imagining their inner life, so to speak; theorising, effectively, that they, too, have a mind. Autism, from this perspective, amounts to a defect in this set of mechanisms: humans suffering from

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① Wordsworth, "Preface," 752.

② Simon Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A New Theory of Human Cruelty and Kindness* (London: Penguin, 2012), xi.

③ Simon Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), xix

spectrum disorders have trouble reading other minds because they don't feel they know there are minds to be read there in the first place. *Mindblindness* does not focus in any great detail on the distinction between knowing and feeling. Only towards the end, in a section on "Individual Differences in 'Empathy'," does Baron-Cohen briefly signal the importance of emotion in mindreading, suggesting this is an avenue for further research and indicating there may be gender differences involved here too.① *The Essential Difference* is Baron-Cohen's answer to his own question, but it is essentially different from the previous book in that it is explicitly conceived as an exercise in "toe"—"dip [ping]" into "politically dangerous waters"② and self-consciously eschews "tiptoe[ing]" around what it's about: "*The female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy. The male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems.*"③ I am not concerned here with the substance of Baron-Cohen's contribution to gender trouble, questionable though it remains;④ rather, what demands notice here is the scientist's forceful performance as a popular public intellectual who emerges from the laboratory to bring much-needed truth to current ideological debates. Much of the evidence presented to back up the book's central claims is still rooted in autism research, but the cautious explication characterising *Mindblindness* now gives way to audacious extrapolation. In *Zero Degrees of Empathy* that trend comes to a climax as Baron-Cohen proposes "a new theory of human cruelty and kindness"—or even, as the title of the American edition has it, invents *The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty*.

The basic proposition of the book is straightforward enough: "the unscientific term 'evil'" should be replaced with "the term 'empathy' erosion."⑤ The assumption is that the brain has an empathy circuit or Empathizing Mechanism whose performance is, like all brain events, in principle open to measurement and ultimately manipulation.

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① Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness*, 135—136.

② Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference* (London: Penguin, 2004), xi.

③ Baron-Cohen, *Essential Difference*, 1.

④ For a critique of the evidence base of Baron-Cohen's construction of gender difference, see Alison Nash and Giordana Grossi, "Picking Barbie's ^{MT} Brain: Inherent Sex Differences in Scientific Ability?", *Journal of Interdisciplinary Feminist Thought* 2:1, 2007, article 5 (available at http://digitalcommons.salve.edu/jift/vol2/iss1/5) and Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences* (Icon Books, 2010).

⑤ Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees*, xi.

This brings the advantage that rather than having to worry in speculative, religious or crypto-religious terms about human inhumanity to humans, we can now see nastiness obstructing the circuit when we run fMRi scans of the brains of the bad, and perhaps even wash them nice with the help of oxytocin nasal spray. ① The question is of course how these advantages travel, if at all, outside the controlled conditions of the laboratory, but Baron-Cohen is clearly confident that focusing on empathy will bring peace:

> By the end of our journey, there should be less of a nagging need for answers to the big question of understanding human cruelty. The mind should be quieted if the answers are beginning to feel satisfying. ②

And not just peace of mind either: in the final pages of the book, Baron-Cohen talks about empathy between Israeli and Palestinian parents of children killed in the Intifada and, while admitting that "this is just a tiny step," adds that "each drop of empathy waters the flower of peace," for "Empathy is like a universal solvent. Any problem immersed in empathy becomes soluble." ③

Baron-Cohen does not discount the importance of environmental, historical, and cultural contingencies, but fundamentally, identifying obstructions in the empathy circuit as the necessary condition for human cruelty does in effect suggest that if only we were more true to neuro-typical human bio-being, universal peace would come at last. If only we were nicer to each other. Do we really need scientists to tell us this? Judging by the popular success of books like *Zero Degrees*, yes, apparently we do: we do need "if only"—"just so"—stories to forget about all those problems empathy cannot solve—including empathy itself. Just like we need a hole in the head to house what religion calls our soul. Baron-Cohen takes pains to distinguish his scientific answer to the question of cruelty from the answers of religion, but the distinction breaks down the moment his hyperbolic extrapolation drive kicks in. It is one thing to identify a circuit in the human brain that lights up when humans feel kindness; it is a second

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① Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees*, 105.
② Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees*, 6—7.
③ Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees*, 132.

thing to argue that this is in all likelihood an evolutionary adaptation reflecting the ultra-social comportment of human animals when compared to other primates; but it makes little sense to conclude from this that empathy is therefore "effective as a way of anticipating and resolving interpersonal problems, whether this is a marital conflict, an international conflict, a problem at work, difficulties in a friendship, political deadlocks, a family dispute, or a problem with the neighbour."① If empathy could achieve all this, it would have done so already. After all, empathy is already at work in human conflict as a matter of course and damage control: if it weren't, it wouldn't be the hardwired adaptation the scientist uncovers; but to the extent that it is, it obviously doesn't deliver the universal solvent the ideologue imagines. There is no doubt more can be done to unlock the positive potential of empathy in all manner of situations, but to advance it as an answer to the challenges of 21st-century life on this planet is to commit a category mistake. Just as religion masks the real contradictions of human life by appealing to an alternative order of ultimate reality and meaning, so neuroscience as ideology denies real time disorder by gesturing towards a deep time source of truth that will restore natural harmony.

None of this is to suggest that empathy is not an important faculty, and rigorous scientific investigation of all human mental labour is clearly to be applauded. But if what such science delivers in response to suffering and injustice is only a souped-up version of what ideologies of sympathy have been piously proposing for the past three centuries or so, the science does not make the difference we need and instead of solving real problems threatens to obscure them. Evidently, not all neuroscientists succumb to the temptation of extrapolation so spectacularly as Baron-Cohen does as he takes up his seat by the fireside in Wordsworth's household of man to join in the mind-quietening. And in itself extrapolation is a risk science must take if it is to develop the new hypotheses it needs to work. But for a risk to be worth taking it should be critical: the hypothesis should respond to the problem it proposes to address in terms that are adequate to it. If neuroscience wants to matter in the diagnosis of global injustice and suffering, it will have to engage with the historical nature of the human animal, not just its natural history, and with the record of such engagement in other disciplines. Most

① Baron-Cohen, 132.

importantly it will have to engage with itself: with the vast gulf between its reach and its grasp (science is nowhere near determining the real complexity of the relation between human conduct, let alone discursively negotiated collective conduct, and the megabillions of neuronsparks firing away in the brain), and with the conceptual incongruities riddling its self-understanding as superscience.

For even if neuroscience could comprehensively and exhaustively articulate activity in the brain with complex human behaviour, the question would still have to be: so what? That there *is* a relation between human behaviour and brain fireworks seems to be a surprise primarily to neuroscientists themselves. The rest of us tend to take this as read. After all, where else would sparks fly if not in the brain? But while it is interesting to learn how and where they fly, it is not clear how exactly that knowledge is supposed to matter in addressing global suffering and injustice. Given the current state of human life on the planet, we already know that our hardwired or wetwired routines are not responding very well to the challenges of the 7 billion and counting. To see them fully imaged in action, however unlikely that prospect is at present, may be satisfying for science and aesthetically pleasing for all, but will not in itself change anything. If the further goal would be to manipulate these fireworks to bring about world peace, assuming for the moment that any manipulation as such would be at alll possible (Welcome to the Matrix), the question would have to be precisely which mental states need to be suppressed and which require boosting to favour the kind of comportment that would bring the Millennium. And for those questions to be answered, the neuro-engineer would have to turn to all humans who have been investigating versions of these questions throughout human history. All humans. And then the surprise would be that quite a few of them have had pretty sound ideas about this already and actually succeeded translating them in beta-applications using the human animal's arch digital imaging technology: the transmission of information through time and space between dead and unborn brains we call writing. Not that those efforts have achieved all that much, but they comfortably outstrip the workings of oxytocine nasal spray.

Marx promised a non-religious resolutely internationalist philosophico-scientific account of human species-beings organising a State that would approximate something like justice. One spirit of Marx scans the world and finds it wanting and decries the

forces of alienation that facilitate human inhumanity, putting its faith, like Shelley and Baron-Cohen, in human nature, or just use value, as the last resort. Another spirit questions the adequacy of notions of human nature, and use value, to the challenges of 21st-century human being on this planet. It, too, embraces findings of neuroscience on human nature but reads them not as solutions but as problems indicating that humans are not wetwired for the life we have produced: default empathy routines just won't do. Let neuro-marxism be one name for the science that sees this.

（本文责任编辑：贾洁）

幽灵障碍：神经—马克思主义与灵魂的状态

奥尔顿·德格雷夫

【内容摘要】本文提出人类正生活在一个神经意识形态的时代。马克思主义的一种观点是强调异化造成了人的非人化，从而将一线希望寄存于人性或使用价值中；另一种观点则对此表示质疑，同时利用神经科学来解读人性，鉴于神经科学有能力恢复自然的和谐，从而可能真正找出人类社会问题的症结所在。笔者将后一种思想称为神经—马克思主义。

【作者简介】奥尔顿·德格雷夫（Ortwin de Graef），比利时鲁汶大学艺术系教授。其研究领域包括审美意识形态、神经意识形态、创伤理论、后结构主义的理论等方面。